

# DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

For Release August 10, 1979

Megan Durham 202/343-5634

## VANDALS KILL 25,000 TROUT AT WEST VIRGINIA FISH HATCHERY

Vandals killed 25,000 brown trout valued at more than \$7,000 at an experimental hatchery of the Interior Department's National Fisheries Center in Leetown, West Virginia, early Tuesday morning.

The vandals entered the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service facility between midnight and 5 a.m. on August 7. They pulled the drain pipes on two 100-foot-long outdoor raceways, causing the water to drain out. The fish were left to suffocate in the air. Federal law enforcement authorities are investigating the case.

The 5-inch-long fish were to be stocked in waters in Northeastern States late this fall or next spring. Fish and Wildlife Service officials said they would make up for the loss by substituting brook trout or other fish species from other hatcheries for stocking.

The officials said that people occasionally kill or steal fish at National Fish Hatcheries, but that the Leetown incident was one of the worst acts of vandalism in recent memory.

"It is unfortunate that people behave so irresponsibly at a facility designed to benefit the public," said Center Director Dr. Robert Putz. "We have not put up a fence before because this is a public facility. In the future, however, these raceways will be used for fish genetics work. We had planned to put up a fence to protect the genetics research, and this incident has just caused us to hasten our decision."

The National Fisheries Center is an internationally known center for research on fish diseases, nutrition, genetics, and other husbandry areas, and operates a training academy for fisheries students from many foreign countries. President Carter visited the facility in June.

The Leetown fish hatchery is one of 92 National Fish Hatcheries operated in 44 States by the Fish and Wildlife Service. The hatcheries produce more than 6 million pounds of fish for stocking annually.

x x x